

Heaven Help Us

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/42875667) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/42875667>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	Gen , M/M , Multi , F/M
Fandom:	Dream SMP
Characters:	Blaze Empress , Kristin Rosales Watson , Goddess of death kristin - Character , Darryl Noveschosch BadBoyHalo , Zak Ahmed Skeppy , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot , Sally the Salmon (Dream SMP) , Watson (Tales from the SMP: The Pit) , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Fantasy , Canon-Typical Violence , Additional Warnings In Author's Note & Chapters
Language:	English
Series:	Part 5 of scarecrow
Stats:	Published: 2022-11-05 Completed: 2022-11-12 Words: 21,839 Chapters: 4/4

Heaven Help Us

by [bramble_patch \(Marianne_Dashwood\)](#), [personalized_radio](#)

Summary

A series of short not!fics set in the scarecrow au

Chapter 1: The story of The Queen of The End and the Other Side & The Blaze Empress of The Nether and The Inbetween

Chapter 2: The Story of Bad and Skeppy & The Crimson Egg

Chapter 3: The Story of Dream and George & The Snowchester Princess

Chapter 4: The Story of How Wilbur Met Sally & The Diary

Notes

Hello!

Hannah here :) i have a handful of not!fic so I'm going to be posting them here. This may get updated periodically after these initial ones are posted just because I can't control myself and neither can MJ tbh

Anyway, I'll update tags and such as each chapter posts. They'll all be going up over the next handful of days as I finish editing them. For now, here is the origins of the scarecrow world :)

p.s. thank u to jess for letting me incorporate her smp lore into the canon <3 love u!

chapter 1 cw: unhappy ending, discussions of the inherent right to struggle to live, death of a dragon

sprawled on these cathedral steps

Once upon a time, in the far distant past, there existed nothing at all. And then, as if by magic, there was *something* .

This something had no name. It was everything and nothing, all at once. And, with time, it grew into a *they* .

Soon, they had an entire realm all to themselves. But they were lonely, and the being found within itself the power to create. It created all things, eventually; the bits of the universe that come together to form the whole - including a pair of godlings.

The three were happy together, for a time. But the being grew bored, and so they continued to create and create. They created the world, plants and animals, air and water. Eventually, they created humans, and other godlings, and the entirety of creation existed in harmony on a singular plane of existence.

The nameless one was content. An entire existence hung at the tips of their fingers, bending to their will, and it was perfect.

But, as with all things eternal, not even the nameless one could escape the fate of infinity. As time passed and the world grew older, the nameless one grew colder - distant from their creations. Always prone to flights of fancy, the nameless one found that their gift of creation could be stretched. Their creations were...malleable. Existence, after all, bent to their will. What was made could be unmade, or made differently.

Infinity, a blessing and a curse both, drove the nameless one mad.

This change came on slowly. It began with a simple creation - it's a creature that explodes upon being threatened.

‘What a tragic existence,’ one of the original godlings says, ‘How terribly sad.’

‘It is lovely to watch the sparks smolder out.’ The nameless one says, and goes on to create more. The creatures begin to grow...worrisome. One, for instance, can only be comfortable when nearly fully submerged in lava; otherwise, it shakes and shivers until it eventually perishes from the cold. Others are doomed to never leave the water, for they can't breathe air like most others can. The nameless one forms human bodies but refuses to give them the spark of life, resulting in soulless, rotted flesh shambling in the dark corners of the world, or cackling, picked-clean bones yearning for completion and willing to tear living beings asunder to find it.

Eventually, the nameless one grows bored of creating new beings and turns their attention to remolding what had already been created. The nameless one unleashes magic into the world, wild and unsparing. New beings were formed via sheer chance, resulting in some that thrived - such as the human-blaze hybrids - and some that failed - human-fish hybrids that suffocate upon being born if they are not immediately submerged in water. The magic impacts the

lands, too; it warps the world in some parts, turning green trees red and water into lava, or disappearing entire swaths of ocean to leave behind sandy, hot deserts.

In the wake of a creator that did not care, the world trembled in anticipation for when the nameless one would grow truly bored and decide to wipe the entire universe clean.

Within this world existed the two first godlings. Created for the express purpose of alleviating the nameless one of their boredom, the two could be considered the prototypical friendship. Where one was, the other could be found. They often spent their days and nights together, discussing anything and everything. Sometimes they agreed - more often, they did not, but every argument ended in laughter and the understanding that through it all they would have each other.

‘Will we die, too, do you think?’ One asked.

‘Perhaps.’ The other answered. ‘If we do, it will be yet another adventure to share.’

‘That would be lovely.’ The first sighs. ‘But I would be so disappointed to see the world disappear. It’s beautiful, isn’t it?’

This godling, in contrast to her friend, had fallen deeply in love with the creations of the nameless one, particularly humanity. She had even gone so far as to make human friends and gain a human name - Kristin. Her friend did not care much for humanity, but she cared very deeply for Kristin and knew the depths of love that Kristin felt for the mortals, and so when Kristin asked her to help Kristin save them, the godling agreed without hesitation.

Together, they convinced their creator and friend, the nameless one, to start fresh in a new realm separate from the one that they had already filled. The nameless one, fond of them and having grown disinterested in their original realm, agreed. Though this realm was the original, it was not the only realm to exist - the nameless one opened the End to the godlings. The End was where the sparks that died went, though each would eventually pass on into a place that even the nameless one dared not touch.

The End was an eternal void. The nameless one soon begins to obsess with exploring it and often disappears for great lengths of time, simply wandering.

With the nameless one’s distraction, peace drifts over the world again.

Kristin and the godling were pleased that their plan had worked. But while the godling was content to exist in the End, Kristin was restless. She missed the other realm - the overworld, as she began to call it - and the mortals. Though the End is beautiful in its own way, it does not have the same plethora of creatures for Kristin to enjoy.

The godling saw that her dear friend was not happy in the End and went to the nameless one with a request. She asked that the nameless one use their gift to create a creature that Kristin would be able to call her own. The nameless one agreed, but asked a price for the deal. In exchange for this gift, the nameless one asked that the godling sacrifice something in return.

The godling, desperate to make her friend happy again, agreed and paid the price.

Soon, Kristin was gifted an egg. With wonder, Kristin cared for the egg until, one day, it hatched. Within the egg was a dragon with scales as dark as obsidian and eyes as bright as stars.

She radiated power, her very core a pulsing mix of magic not unlike Kristin's own core. Kristin recognized this power as her friend's and confronted her. When the godling confessed what she had done, Kristin was moved deeply. Kristin loved this gift, which she named Vespera. And Vespera loved her back - love for Kristin was baked into the very magic that made her, after all.

The godling was also fond of Vespera, though she had sacrificed much to make her. And so, for a time, the three of them and the younger godlings and the nameless one were happy and at peace within the End.

Unfortunately, that peace could not last.

Though the void was endless, the nameless one eventually grew bored. They turned their attention back to the overworld, and they found it lacking.

The nameless one began to wonder how far they could push their own powers. Infinity had eaten the last of the nameless one's sanity and all they saw was destruction.

Neither Kristin nor the godling could bear the idea. The godling knew that the nameless one would not spare them in their quest to wipe the realms clean. She had tasted what it meant to create when she'd used half her heart to give spark to Vespera, and she did not want to see all the sparks in all the realms extinguished. And Kristin, who loved each being and knew each life's precious story by heart, did not want to give up her growing library or the billions of stories still to come.

With grief in their hearts for their creator, Kristin and the godling united forces against the nameless one and turned on them. They pulled the other godlings along with them, some loyal to Kristin and some to the godling but all working together to defeat the nameless one.

Unfortunately, even their combined might was not enough to wholly defeat the nameless one. Though they managed to keep them within the End, it was a harsh fight. The godling was not able to stand equal with Kristin with half of her heart gone, and she was still recovering from so much of her power going to form Kristin's gift.

Vespera was a great asset in their fight. As she grew in size and might, her power grew with her. She stayed at Kristin's side, bonded to her, a guardian to the End and Kristin both. Kristin loved her as one might a daughter and Vespera was loyal and powerful.

It was that loyalty and power that marked her doom. For this fight was one for all of creation and Kristin knew what needed to be done.

The godling begged Kristin to spare Vespera. She believed that they would win without consuming her power.

Kristin would not be swayed, though. Kristin struck her guardian down, despite the godling's attempts to save her. Vespera perished, leaving behind only a small, dark egg. Vespera's death unleashed the power that had fueled her life. Kristin consumed this power. The godling secreted the egg, the half of her heart she had traded away, from Kristin's hands, her trust and heart broken.

With this new power at her fingertips, Kristin and the godling were able to defeat the nameless one. Together, they tore the nameless one's power from their core and the nameless one, for the first time in existence, no longer was. Kristin and the godling did not know what to do next; they had the godhood of an eternal being the likes of which would never exist again. The godling proposed that they let the magic go and do as it will, but Kristin believed that to do so would be irresponsible. Instead, Kristin asked her friend to split the nameless one's gifts between the two of them so that they may rule together. At first, the godling did not want this power, but Kristin was persuasive and earnest in her belief that they would do right by the realms and their loyal armies. So the godling agreed and they consumed the nameless one's gifts together.

Kristin, who loved each spark's story and had grown to understand the importance of things coming to an end, took the responsibility for Death and destruction. She named herself Queen of the Other Side, where souls find peace.

The godling, who cherished the birth of each creation and had grown protective of each being's will to live despite even the worst of conditions, took the responsibility of Life and creation. She named herself the Blaze Empress of the Inbetween, the place between Life and Death.

Together, they began their rule. Kristin hoped that, with the ending of the conflict with the nameless one, she and the Empress could return to as they once were. But the Empress was cold to her, and would not spend time with her as they once did. The Empress would not forgive Kristin for the death of Vespera and Kristin grew to resent this coldness, believing that she had made the only choice she could.

And perhaps, one day, the two would be able to reach an understanding, if not for the magic permeating the overworld.

It was their first order of business as joint rulers; what to do about the magic that had spread throughout the world. They agreed that it would be best if they slowly reeled it back in to better control the chaos of wild magic loosed on existence - but their agreement ended there.

Kristin yearned for the world before the nameless one lost their sanity. Life was simpler and kinder, then. She wanted to cleanse the world of the effects that the wild magic had left - reverse the deserts and the warped forests, and put an end to the hybridizations now roaming. Kristin argued that existence was painful for many of them - fish-mortals who would never be able to leave the water, bird-mortals with wings too small to fly, boar-creatures who shivered to death in the chill of the overworld, beings who simply could not thrive in the realms in which they existed. Kristin wanted to cut the magic off from the world and let these lineages fade out and return existence to what it once was.

The Empress knew that they could never go back to the times before; her heart had been broken in two and her gift destroyed for her power to be consumed. The Empress wanted to move forward and forget the past. She argued that the magic did not act without intent - it chose to let live those which may have not otherwise had the chance, to give opportunity where it otherwise could not be found. If a creature could not breathe air, let it build cities under water. If a bird could not fly, let it glide. If the overworld was too cold, then they should open the third realm, where life began, and allow those beings to live there, instead. Though the nameless one had lost their sanity, the magic had not and nothing it had changed should be reversed.

Kristin begged the Empress to change her mind, but the Empress would not. While Kristin wished to be together and happy once again, the Empress was once bitten, twice shy and would not yield to her old friend. When begging did not work, Kristin, in her desperation, grew angry. She attempted to force the Empress to see her side of things - was it not because of death and destruction that they turned on the nameless one? Were these not the most powerful of all their gifts? Was Kristin not stronger than the Empress, with the power that had made Vespera now in Kristin's core and all of Death in the palm of her hands?

The Empress could bear much. She had sacrificed half of her heart and lost much of her power, only for her gift to be destroyed by the one she held most dear. She had watched the first life she'd ever given be snuffed out in order to help defeat her creator, whom she loved. She had accepted the responsibility of ruling the dominions of Life and Creation and the Inbetween at Kristin's side because she truly believed that they would make a fair and just pair. But an attempt by her partner to subjugate her? To *force* her to comply? It was a humiliation that not even the nameless one had had the gall to attempt.

Kristin realized her mistake and attempted to take back her words, but the Empress does not forget and she does not forgive.

'Once, you held my entire heart.' The Empress declares for all the godlings residing in the End to hear, 'But your hubris knows no bounds, just as our creator's. I am not a mortal for you to play your tricks with, nor am I a loving dragon willing to bare my throat to your selfish claws. I am *life* and I owe no loyalty to those who would attempt to imprison me.'

Kristin could only watch, helpless, as the Empress used her new gifts to rip open the third realm, where life began. It was called the Nether, and the Empress took herself and those most loyal to her and claimed dominion over the fiery realm where the sparks that gave life were formed. The Empress took many of the creatures that struggled to survive in the overworld and brought them with her, intent to give them a home where they would thrive. She allowed her magic to roam; even if Kristin attempted to call back that wild power, she would only be half successful, as the Empress showed her no quarter or mercy.

And so, the three realms were linked and the Queen of the End and the Other Side and the Blaze Empress of the Nether and the Inbetween began their eons-long rivalry.

At first, Kristin attempted to re-establish their previous relationship. She sent gifts and letters, apologies and platitudes. But the Empress was harsh and final. Kristin's tributes were returned, sometimes only ashes remaining.

The next centuries were petty and cruel. The Queen and the Empress were much like their creator in many ways, as they were their first creations and friends. The Empress' magic gave life to beings that were rightfully meant to be Kristin's at much earlier an age. In return, Kristin's magic strewed misdeeds that often resulted in misfortune for those the Empress allowed life where it had not previously been.

They were separated, their relationship fractured. Both godlings-turned-goddesses were very lonely. They had entire courts - and they grew, as both settled into their powers and understood how the magic gifted them followers - but no one that they could call friend, equal, or partner.

And then, one day, the Empress met a mortal. This mortal was quick of wit and on their feet; this mortal, for the first time in a very long time, made the Empress laugh. This laugh was a rare sound and had been for some time; even Kristin only pulled laughter from the Empress sparingly in their youth, for she had always been a stoic and quiet being. But this mortal was charming and funny and willing to brave journeying through the Nether to speak with the Empress as her castle was built upon the roof of the Nether.

Rumor of this mortal, who entered and exited the Nether at will through a portal made in the overworld, reached Kristin through her various Allay. The news frustrated Kristin. The Empress had always looked down on the mortals when Kristin spoke fondly of them; she had never appreciated their lives as Kristin did. Kristin spent most of her near-infinite life flipping through their stories, reading of their lives, speaking with them when they passed through to the Other Side. Kristin was even able to invite the truly remarkable ones to become one of her Allay and stay within her court. What right did the Empress have to suddenly grow fond of one, when she had always turned her nose up to them before?

The mortals were *Kristin's* favored creature, not the Empress'!

And yet, Kristin continued to hear of this mortal, who made the Empress happy when Kristin was not even able to exchange cordial letters with someone who had once considered Kristin to be the dearest person in the entirety of existence.

And so, in a pique of resentment and anger, Kristin waited for the mortal to return to the overworld and her gift visited this mortal. Though this mortal's story was set to have many pages, Kristin's displeasure cut the chapters short and the mortal was left with only a rather succinct epilogue and a closed cover.

Kristin knew that the Empress would grieve, but did not care. Her anger was sharp and fulfilling and righteous - because if it was not, Kristin might be forced to contend with the fact that she had made many mistakes in her attempt to run from facing up to what she had done.

That swift and powerful anger, though, was snuffed out when, upon hearing what had befallen her favored mortal, the Empress sent Kristin a gift.

It was received by a visiting Vex, one of the Empress' loyal followers. The Vex wore a mask with a carved sigil and a cloak that obfuscated their form. They brought only a small box wrapped in rough twine. It was sealed by a wax thumbprint.

Within the box was a familiar egg and a note.

‘Is this what you desire?’ The note demanded. ‘The chance to bleed my heart of life once again? Have at it, then, you cruel thing. It is forever tied to your line, after all. But know this, Queen of the End. Neither this egg, nor my heart, shall ever be yours again. You are unworthy of either.’

Kristin stared at the note for a very long time. Her anger was as a wave; it crested and left devastation in its wake, but when the ocean of her emotions was calm again, she was left with a mess of her own making. This note and the egg - cold and unresponsive to her touch - told her that she had truly lost the Empress and would never have her again.

And so, the two settled into existing separately. Kristin, mellowed by the loss of her dearest friend and finally willing to admit that it was by her own haste and pride that she now sits atop a lonely throne, stays within the End and rules her kingdom. The Empress, distant and cold and disenchanted with love, kindness, friendship, and unwilling to bear the half of her heart she has left, stays within the Nether and rules her kingdom.

And never did the two see each other again.

would you pray for me or make a saint of me

Chapter Notes

Hello! finished this just in time :) the name of this chapter is funny bc bad's gamertag was saintsofgames

anyway, we hope u enjoy! i dont have a beta for these, I'm just having mari read em over before posting so any mistakes with tenses are mine, I'm sorry!

chapter 2 cw: cults, mind-control

Once upon a time, in a country called the Badlands, there lived a fire demon named Bad.

When he was a small child, Bad's name was Halo. As was customary, Bad had gained his new, public name when he'd become old enough to be introduced to society at large and he felt that this one fit him much better. To be next to Bad was to be next to a tornado - charged and whirring and making a path of his own that left plenty of wreckage if something didn't have the good sense to get out of the way.

You see, Bad had big aspirations and not much to keep him from them. Bad was unto a king of sorts; his family had lived and protected the same small but bountiful landscape since most people could remember and, as his parents passed when Bad was relatively young, he had the wealth, education, and freedom to do as he willed. On top of that, Bad was a powerful fire demon, naturally talented and meeting advanced milestones far sooner than most other fire demons his age.

Bad was strong-willed and stubborn; he thought highly of himself and was rarely humble. Only one person had ever managed to go toe-to-toe with Bad and escape unscathed by either his biting wit or his fire - that was his childhood neighbor, Skeppy.

Skeppy was the son of another long-standing family native to the lands that Bad's family had protected for so long; a diamond hybrid, Skeppy was mostly immune to Bad's fire and had spent every moment since he'd learned to walk tormenting Bad to prove it. Even when they'd been practically toddlers, Skeppy had never shrunk from giving Bad a piece of his mind. That didn't stop as they grew older and Skeppy eventually stopped growing in height while Bad sprouted higher and higher until he towered over his smaller friend; Skeppy was often the only person to meet Bad's chaotic energy where it was and match him, if not far exceeding him in some ways. It was a partnership that they both valued, despite their ups and downs.

In time, this friendship grew into something else. Bad had always valued and appreciated Skeppy's presence at his side but, as they grew older and began to experience the world together, Bad came to realize that his feelings for Skeppy were different from his feelings for other friends. He came to realize that he was in love.

When Bad confessed, Skeppy was not surprised. In fact, he'd been waiting for Bad to reach the same conclusion that Skeppy had for quite awhile - they were meant to be together, Skeppy had long decided, and no one else would take Skeppy's place at Bad's side, nor Bad's at Skeppy's.

They were still young when they made this vow together - Bad had not even finished his education yet, though he'd long set his sights on Pandora and the council that met there. Bad wanted to make a name for himself in the Badlands and the worlds beyond - he wanted to be more than just a simple fire demon, he wanted to change the world. He had thoughts and ideas, ranging from crop rotations all the way to taxation policy, and he wanted to share these thoughts with people of equal standing and thought.

Skeppy did not care about crop rotation or taxation. He was content to make a life wherever Bad ended up; Skeppy was flexible, after all, and keeping Bad from landing himself in outer space when he was only shooting for the moon was a full time job. No, Skeppy liked a simpler life. He enjoyed a slower life than Bad did; while Bad always yearned for the next challenge, never wanted to stop striding, Skeppy enjoyed living in the moment and appreciating the smaller things in life. If Bad was working, Skeppy could often be found not too far off, planning a way to convince Bad to skirt his duties and go for a walk together. More often than not, Skeppy won his way and the two were known for their fearsome pranks. No one was safe when they were together, except the two of them (and even that was a toss-up when one of them was in a mood).

And so the two of them grew up together and found love together. Bad finished his education and began his journey to becoming a member of the Pandora Council; Skeppy came along for the ride, happy to support Bad and, more importantly, cause chaos in the stuffy atmosphere that most official business took place in. They came to Pandora and found a nice apartment together in a part of the city not too far from Bad's place of work but not so close that Skeppy felt stifled.

And thus their struggles began.

Pandora at this time was in a bit of an upheaval. The Badlands are not like many other places in the world; the country is made up of smaller city-states and each one is protected by an ancient family, unless that family had been replaced and a new one installed. Bad was one of the original families still reigning over their territory, but many had been taken out and replaced with new families with an eye for the capital's council. It is during this upheaval that our two lovebirds, freshly married and ready to take the politics of Pandora by storm, arrive in the capital.

For Skeppy, the move was relatively seamless. His family hadn't thought it proper for the lord of the land to leave for Pandora and the fight had created a rift between Skeppy and Bad and Skeppy's family, but Skeppy was someone who only looked toward the future and rarely glanced behind himself. He settled into the apartment the life in Pandora well; he made

friends and quickly became a favorite of other spouses for his jokes and good humor and the obvious devotion he and Bad shared.

Bad did not settle in so easily; every turn he took in his career offered only tall walls that he was forced to climb alongside many others. Bad had gone from being a shark in a pond to a fish in the ocean; there were a number of other young people with talent and drive also working to reach the same goal as him, and many were even of the same status as him, but had living families to help support them from behind. Bad was all alone except for his husband - though Bad wouldn't have traded Skeppy for anything or anyone else in the world.

At least, that is what Bad believed about himself. And then, one day, a newly made work friend approached Bad with an offer. There had been a newly discovered being uncovered from the earth that predated much of the world around them; it was looking for followers. It wanted to be reborn and change the world for the better.

Bad wasn't sure what to think. He brought this offer home to Skeppy, who looked at it with scorn and told Bad to toss the offer aside.

'No good can come from a dug up godling with an interest in politics.' Skeppy warned, 'You're better off working hard and achieving the dreams you've been working for this whole time, Bad. Don't let ambition blind you from what matters.'

Bad agreed and returned to work the next day to tell his associate that he was not interested.

'Come see it,' the associate offered, 'Just once, and then make up your mind.'

And Bad meant to deny him again, but Bad was a curious creature by nature, and had enough pride in himself to believe that he could defeat anything that came his way. That day, Bad followed his associate to meet this being that wanted followers to help his change the world.

That was when Bad met the Egg.

Hello, little demon , the Egg said to him upon Bad approaching it.

'Hello,' Bad said politely, 'I've come to politely decline your request to join your services.'

Oh? The Egg said, *But I can give you so much* .

'I don't need to be given anything.' Bad said firmly. 'I can achieve whatever I want on my own.'

I see . The Egg said. *Even this?*

The Egg showed Bad a world where everything he'd ever wanted had come true. Bad was strong and respected and powerful; he had Skeppy, who was beaming with pride and happy to be at Bad's side. They had children running around, two boys with inner flames of their own. They were young and established and perfectly happy together, with their family and a world that had been changed for the better - a happy people, a united country, a world safe for their children to grow up in.

I can give you this . The Egg promised.

‘How?’ Bad asked.

Just trust me and do as I bid. The Egg offered and Bad could not resist. He accepted the Egg’s deal and felt it enter his mind.

Bad did not come home that night, nor for a full week after. Skeppy was beside himself by the time Bad finally returned. Bad tried to tell him of this future, this promise, but Skeppy wouldn’t hear of it - he was furious that Bad had disappeared, even more so that he’d gone to see the being and had accepted any sort of deal with it. Bad had seen Skeppy angry before but never like this - and Skeppy had never been this angry before, for he’d never been so scared in his entire life. There had never been a threat like this, or something that had managed to keep Bad from him for so long since the moment they’d met.

Ultimately, the two of them fought. It was rather vicious and cruel, in ways that only a fight between people who had known each other for forever could be. Bad left again, swearing that he knew what he was doing and Skeppy just needed to trust him, and Skeppy told him not to come back if he was choosing to work for the Egg instead of staying with Skeppy.

This hurt Bad to his core and, for a moment, he was truly able to look at himself and his choices and realize that they were not choices that he wanted to make. But the Egg’s control was fast and powerful and it quickly consumed him again. Bad returned to the Egg and its followers.

Though Bad may have felt stuck in place, he was actually a rising star in Pandora. Driven and kind, educated and knowledgeable about a host of topics, with a charming spouse and an obvious love for his people and the Badlands, not to mention a sharp sense of politics, Bad was often looked at for opportunities by his mentors and predecessors. He was a prime follower for the Egg to have amassed, and his status was soon being used by the Egg and Bad’s associates to further its own agenda. The Egg wanted to eventually install a member of its own into the council of Pandora and slowly brainwash the entire council so that the Egg was the ultimate authority.

This plan may have worked if not for Skeppy, who, despite his harsh words, did not abandon his husband. Skeppy came looking for Bad soon after their fight. The Egg, perturbed that Bad had managed to shake its control due to his feelings for Skeppy, sent its followers to kidnap Skeppy and bring him before the primordial being without Bad’s knowledge.

The fight was great. Skeppy was no wilting house husband; he fought back with vigor, leaving quite a few injured in his wake. He even punched the Egg, though it did little good.

I see you cannot be reasoned with . The Egg said sourly when Skeppy was finally restrained.

Skeppy’s response was rather vulgar and could not be repeated in retellings of this story, but suffice to say that it was a colored and enthusiastic invitation for the Egg if it were so inclined.

Skeppy could not be swayed to the Egg’s cause and so the Egg simply enveloped his mind.

When Bad returned to the Egg, he was shocked to see that Skeppy had joined the Egg's followers.

'Skeppy?' Bad asked upon seeing him.

'Bad.' Skeppy said, though his voice was odd and not at all like him. There was none of the warmth that usually underlined Bad's name when Skeppy said it; this was cold and distant, an empty voice to match Skeppy's empty eyes.

'What have you done?' Bad demanded of the Egg, 'What did you do to him!?'

He has seen the truth of my power . The Egg told him. Fear not. He cannot impede you any longer.

This shocked and angered Bad; Skeppy was not one to be controlled. He was a free agent, content with a life only when it allowed him to do as he pleased. Skeppy was like the wind, like the ocean; he could not be contained. For the Egg to attempt to do so was to make Skeppy the antithesis of who he was.

Bad, looking upon his love, broke free of the Egg's influence all at once, so great were his feelings. The Egg attempted to regain control, but Bad could not be stopped. With a cry of outrage, Bad unleashed his birthright - a great flame that soon engulfed the Egg and the entire cavern that Bad and the other followers had excavated for their lord. Bad was not a warrior despite his advanced talent in controlling his flame, but he did not need training for this attack. His fire was so hot that he scorched the very rock that had once held the egg, steaming away the dampness of the cavern, burning each of the Egg's vines to a crisp. The Egg itself did not escape. With a screech that echoed in the minds of each of its followers, the Egg was overcome by Bad's blaze.

In the confusion of the psychic backlash, Bad stole away with Skeppy, who had fallen unconscious. Bad submitted a detailed report of exactly what had been discovered and who had been involved, and then disappeared with Skeppy before any of the Egg's remaining followers could take their revenge.

Bad stayed in contact with many of his mentors and friends while hiding out with Skeppy; though the Egg had been defeated - for now, at least - there were many other plots that were discovered with Bad's help, as he'd been involved in a number of them during his time with the Egg.

It took Skeppy a long time to wake up properly after his time being controlled. When he did, it was not a peaceful day for either of them. Skeppy was angry and betrayed; he lashed out at Bad and denounced their marriage. Though they could not safely proceed with a divorce, Skeppy informed Bad that, as far as he was concerned, their marriage was over the moment Bad had chosen to follow the Egg instead of returning home to Skeppy.

Bad, who was finally humbled, knew that he'd betrayed Skeppy and their bond and understood that it was his own hubris that had lost him his soulmate. Due to the danger that they were in, the two of them had to stay together during the next months, moving from place to place while Bad's allies helped to sniff out the last of the Egg's influence and the other

plots that Bad had uncovered were cleaned up. Skeppy would not speak with Bad after telling him that their marriage was over.

Still, Bad could not bring himself to lose hope. Skeppy had always been the braver of the two of them - Bad could only stand tall because of the foundation that Skeppy had created for him. It was Bad's turn to be brave now, as Skeppy was recovering and scared of the world.

Being away from the Egg was painful for them both; like a drug that they had both grown much too dependent on suddenly being stripped from them. Bad could not allow himself time to feel bad for himself; he was in charge of making sure that their safehouses stayed safe, in charge of taking care of Skeppy when he was ill, in charge of keeping correspondence with Pandora going so they'd have lives to eventually return to, if they chose to. Bad knew that this was his penance for what he'd done and what he'd allowed to happen to the love of his life.

Finally, the day came that his allies informed Bad that it was safe to return. When Bad asked Skeppy what he wanted to do, Skeppy informed Bad that he would not be returning to Pandora. He would go traveling.

Bad, heartbroken, knew that he could do nothing but support Skeppy in his journeys. He told Skeppy that if he needed anything, he would only need to send for Bad and he would be there. Skeppy promised that he would not need anything.

They parted ways. Bad watched Skeppy leave and wept when he was out of sight. And then Bad returned to Pandora and began the struggle of making change without Skeppy's support.

A year passed before Bad received the first letter; it was short in both length and tone, simply telling Bad that Skeppy would be in Pandora in the next month and wouldn't be opposed to dinner.

Bad spent the next month doing nothing but cleaning and cooking, practicing every meal he knew in order to perfect it. When the day finally came that Skeppy sent a letter telling him he was in town, Bad was prepared.

They had never gone through with the divorce, but Bad had no expectations that Skeppy was returning to him as a husband. Bad would have been content with anything, even a distant friendship.

But Skeppy allowed a dinner, and then another. On their third date, Skeppy opened the floor to discussion. He felt he'd healed enough to be able to speak with Bad about what had happened; his feelings and Bad's, the experience as a whole. And he told Bad about his journey across the Badlands and beyond; he'd met a fresh captain taking her first voyage on the sea in a beaten up vessel and she'd allowed him to tag along. Skeppy had traveled to Kinoko with Captain Puffy, and then they'd sailed to Snowchester, and then all the way up until they'd almost hit L'Manburg before the rocky political horizon had sent them coming back home. He'd walked hundreds of miles, enjoyed foods and wines, met new people, danced and laughed, sang and performed for coin. Skeppy had enjoyed the life he'd led after leaving Bad

He'd never managed to forget about him, though, Skeppy was able to admit. He'd missed him. And it was because he'd missed him, even at the best moments of this new journey, that Skeppy decided that he wanted to return to Bad and see if they could rebuild something between them.

'Yes.' Bad had practically begged. Whatever Skeppy wanted to rebuild, Bad wanted it, too. More than he wanted power, or the politics, or even the Ambassador opportunity that Bad knew would be opening up in the coming years, he wanted Skeppy and the life that he'd lost with him more than any of that.

And so Skeppy decided to stay in Pandora and the two began again; slowly, carefully, faithfully, Bad and Skeppy rebuilt what the Egg and ambition had almost destroyed. Skeppy didn't ask for Bad to give up his career, but he did expect to be prioritized. Bad, now familiar with what life could be like without the person he cared about most, had no problem doing so, even at cost to his career.

And together, they did rebuild. It was not easy; Skeppy often went on walks when they disagreed, and he swore that he would never chase Bad down again if he chose to leave. Bad was terrified that one wrong word would send Skeppy running again and often had to work to communicate his true feelings. They both cradled their fragile, broken relationship between themselves and worked together to make it strong again. When Bad carefully asked Skeppy why he was willing to give him these chances again, Skeppy could only say this: Life was a cycle of building things and losing them all and building them up again. Skeppy had tried to rebuild without Bad, but life was lacking. Skeppy wanted Bad to be there when he rebuilt, and that meant pursuing forgiveness if he wanted this to work. He did. Skeppy missed his husband and wanted to stay with Bad, even after the Egg.

That day, Bad wept again, and swore to Skeppy that he would not lose sight of what was truly important again.

And one day, after hard work and terrifying trust, they were able to call each other husbands again and neither of them flinched. Soon after that day, Skeppy casually asked how Bad might feel about having a baby. Bad imagined that life that the Egg had promised - children running around, the two of them together and happy and safe and secure - and knew that whatever future they built together would be so much more beautiful for the simple fact that it was real and theirs.

Bad said yes.

and angels coming screaming

Chapter Notes

dnf get together :)

cw: none

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom. The kingdom was called Kinoko and it was ruled by a Queen and her Prince Consort.

This Queen and her husband had one son, who was intelligent and handsome and had all the makings of a great king. His only problem, this prince, was that he did not want to be king and, in fact, had no interest at all in his kingdom. He might have the blood and the brains, but he did not have the drive.

Still, the prince was much-desired by the princes and princesses of the surrounding lands. Kinoko was a thriving kingdom with strong alliances and a healthy tradeline. The prince was already well connected - one of his first knights was the heir to a small but well-respected city-state that had had a seat on the Pandora Council for centuries, he had been tutored by the best and brightest Kinoko had to offer. And, perhaps most importantly to the young royalty swimming in the matchmaking pools of their aristocratic parents and guardians, the prince's fair face and dancing prowess were well known.

The prince's name was George and, at the age of twenty-two, he was considered quite the eligible bachelor. Well-bred, well-positioned, well-mannered, and well-groomed, George was well on his way to finding a fiancée to one day rule at his side.

And this, dear reader, is where George's first roadblock to becoming affianced can be found. You see, George was already in love. George was a prince and so he was deserving of a truly fairy tale love and George was lucky enough to have it. George had been in love for perhaps many years, or perhaps only a few. In either case, he'd loved this person since he was a young boy and that love had grown with him and eventually shifted from the innocence of a youth's first crush to the tried-and-true devotion of a young man who knows when he has met his heart's match.

George was in the sort of love that would one day save his life and his kingdom; the kind of love that story books were written about. The kind of love that allowed true love's kiss to fix something, though generally that was not how life worked.

Prince George was in love with his almost-knight, Dream.

Dream was about a year from graduating into the knighthood. He'd come to Kinoko as a young boy and he'd stumbled across George in the garden. George had thought him a simple son of a servant, in his worn clothing and the ratted nest of curls on his head. Little had George known that Dream would be introduced as his First Knight, alongside who would become George's dearest friend, Sapnap, two years later. That first official meeting had resulted in Dream offering George his hand. George had taken it and had not let go of it since.

Now, years later, George was in love with Dream and, perhaps even better or perhaps *worse*, he knew that Dream was in love with him, too.

When George realized he was in love with Dream, it was both a relief and a curse. George knew that, were he to tell Dream, then George would get exactly what he wanted. Dream would devote himself to George wholly and fully. But George was a prince and Dream was his knight; worse, George knew the fate that might one day await him should he take the throne. If George stayed as a prince and became king, then Dream would never have a life that would truly make him happy - he would be tied to the throne, just as George's father was; a miserable ghost haunting the halls of the castle, good for appearances at royal events and the occasional awkward, silent dinner with his family but not much else.

George *loved* Dream, and did not want to subject him to the fate that would most likely befall him should he and George wed while George was a prince.

For these reasons, George hid his feelings from Dream. And Dream, who was already wholly devoted and loyal, and who had long resigned himself to loving George from afar and spending his life at George's side as only his best friend and First Knight, was content with this lot in life because it meant that he at least got to spend this life with George.

Sapnap, their shared soulmate and the confidant of both, could only sigh in disappointment.

And so, the status quo of our heroes is set. And perhaps this would be the status quo forever - until the arrival of a Snowchester princess and her father, invited by the Queen and Prince Consort of Kinoko for the purposes of matchmaking with their son.

Princess Genevieve is the Queen of Snowchester's third daughter, first born of the queen's first husband and fourth in line for the throne of Snowchester. She is favored by the queen, which puts her at quite the advantage to her siblings despite her birth order. Princess Genevieve is a renowned swordswoman with an interest in cartography and a near encyclopedic knowledge of the boundary lines of the Badlands, Snowchester, Kinoko, and the Greater SMP. Most importantly, with a princess of Snowchester as a wife and queen and a prince of a Badlands city-state as a First Knight, George would be firmly tied to both nations and Kinoko would benefit from the close relations to their trading partners.

The Queen of Kinoko was a pragmatic woman. With these thoughts in mind, she invited Princess Genevieve and her father to Kinoko and informed George that the princess would be arriving in one month's time in order to see if they may be an advantageous match.

'We will not be.' The prince said, rather firmly.

‘We shall see.’ The Queen did not budge, and so the prince swept from the room and his knights silently followed.

‘You’re going to be meeting a princess.’ Dream said as they walk.

‘I shall.’ The prince agrees. ‘I rather think I’ll be meeting a lot of them in the next few years. I’m of age to marry, now.’

‘I see.’ the mostly-knight said. ‘I hope the princess is to your liking, then, to avoid such a drawn out process.’

In the coming weeks, Dream becomes morose and distant.

You see, Dream was a romantic at heart. Though he was content with their relationship, he still held out the faintest hope that one day, George may return his affections. With the prospect of marriage on the horizon and George’s blase attitude toward it all, Dream was faced with the idea that George may one day marry a prince or princess and Dream’s hopes would be snuffed out.

George was concerned by his friend’s behavior, unaware of Dream’s inner turmoil and unsure of what to make of this new, somber Dream. When he attempted to broach the subject, Dream simply disappeared with excuses about chores and tasks. George was never one to handle uncertainty well and he often came off as spoiled and abrasive when unsure. He wasn’t used to his demands not being met or Dream denying him anything, really - but Dream did. He ran from George, hiding behind laundry and drills and mundane errands, and George was left lost and frustrated.

Sapnap, who knew exactly what was going on, felt it best if he simply minded his business and allowed the two of them their squabble.

Finally, the day came where Princess Genevieve arrived. She came into Kinoko with fanfare, her proud father at her side.

Genevieve was as lovely as the Queen had described, with long, auburn tresses and a practical-yet-stylish dress and a sword at her hip that denoted her love of dueling. She was polite and social, though a bit abrasive in her own way. She was welcomed by Kinoko and the royal family upon her arrival to the castle and Dream prepared himself for George to fall in love.

But George did not. He barely showed any interest at all. George was passive and polite. He did not smile at her jokes, nor did he stare at her dress, or ask about her sword. He did not ask to take a stroll through the grounds with her to show off his home, nor did he share any meal with her outside of the welcoming feast and expected family dinners, and he demured when Genevieve was so bold as to ask him to spend time with her.

The prince of Kinoko made it very clear, by deed if not word, that he was not interested in marrying Princess Genevieve. And Genevieve, the proud daughter of the Snowchester queen, was not so in need of a husband as to debase herself in an attempt to woo him.

Instead, the responsibility of filling her time was dropped to a loyal, trustworthy, knowledgeable sort-of-knight. The soon-to-be-knight Sir Dream was tasked with keeping Genevieve occupied where the prince would not.

Dream is nice and friendly and funny; he is talented in dueling and unafraid to accept Princess Genevieve's offer to cross blades (wooden, of course). It is no wonder that Princess Genevieve, unaware of Dream's feelings for George, was soon swayed by Dream's good looks and kind eyes. She was not the first, nor would she be the last, but she was certainly forward in her affections.

The one-day-knight Dream, on the other hand, was unaware that he had caught Genevieve's eye. Instead, Dream was mostly just annoyed that he was stuck playing tour guide for a royal he didn't know, though Princess Genevieve wasn't the worst royal that he could have been stuck with.

If Dream was upset, then Prince George was furious. Not because he was worried that Dream may grow to love her back but that Dream had to spend so much time with her instead of with his prince.

Princess Genevieve was set to stay in Kinoko for a fortnight. George counted down the days.

Finally, the last night came. At sunrise the next day, Princess Genevieve and her father, who George had not managed to escape as wholly as he had escaped the man's daughter, would be headed back to Snowchester and, George hoped, life would return to normal.

'Have the two of you made a decision?' The Queen asked them at the farewell feast.

'Yes.' Princess Genevieve and Prince George say as one.

'We would not be well suited.' Prince George said.

'Besides.' Princess Genevieve said. 'I have interest in another.'

'Another?' her father asked in alarm. George's heart sunk.

'Why, yes.' Princess Genevieve continues. 'I have fallen in love with Sir Dream and would wed him, if the Queen would be so kind as to release him from his oath to her.'

'*What !?*' The prince demanded. The Prince Consort, silent through much of this exchange, choked on his drink at the news. It is, after all, a well known fact that Sir Dream's heart had long been taken by Prince George. It was one reason he was chosen to escort the good princess around during her fortnight's visit.

Unfortunately for all involved, the words 'Dream was taken by another' did not fully encompass the depths of Dream's feelings and they did not accurately convey the situation to the princess or her father, who demanded to meet the man that had stolen his daughter's heart.

And so Dream was summoned.

Sir Dream had never been invited to a feast quite like this - it was an intimate affair, after all, meant only for royals. Dream was no royal.

But Dream was summoned and so he did appear in front of the Queen and her Prince Consort, and the Prince, and the Snowchester First Husband and the Princess.

‘How may I be of service, your Majesty?’ The almost-knight asked upon being acknowledged.

‘Tell me, what wicked tricks did you use to seduce my daughter?’ The Snowchester First Husband demanded.

Sir Dream was shocked and confused amidst the general rumble of disagreement from the rest of the royals before him.

Prince George did not only disagree. He was incensed.

‘Mind your tongue when speaking to my knight,’ Prince George spat, ‘else you will be reminded how far from home you are right now.’

‘*George*,’ his mother reprimanded amongst gasps, ‘Apologize right this instant.’

‘I’ll not.’ Prince George held his head high, ‘I’ll apologize when he does. Dream has done nothing untoward and I’ll not allow disrespect on any of my people, let alone on my own First Knight!’

‘He seduced my daughter!’ Snowchester’s First Husband accused.

‘I did *what* !?’ Sir Dream exclaims in confusion, still uncertain of exactly why he’d been brought forward.

‘He did not seduce me.’ The princess comes forward, correcting her father. ‘It is only that Sir Dream is loyal and kind and handsome and I have enjoyed knowing him. I find that I would not be opposed to him returning to Snowchester with us so that we may one day be wed.’

‘Oh, dear.’ Sir Dream said.

‘Dream is not available for marriage.’ The prince said firmly.

‘Why not?’ The princess asked, ‘What need have you for *two* First Knights?’

Prince George, so outraged that his words would not work, could only stare at her.

‘My lady,’ Sir Dream steps forward, gathering attention once again. ‘I am honored by your attention, but I am afraid I must respectfully refuse your proposal.’

‘You dare to insult my daughter with rejection?’ Snowchester’s First Husband demanded, ‘The insolence!’

‘I mean no disrespect, my lord,’ Sir Dream assures him before George can find his words beneath that anger. ‘It is only that I am not worthy of her hand.’

‘How so?’ The princess frowns, ‘Sir Dream, you are a First Knight. There is only the royal family who you answer to.’

‘I am afraid that my rank is only by his Highness’ will,’ Sir Dream explains. It is easy, after all, for Dream to think of reasons that he would not be worthy of royalty. He’d thought of this very list many times before, and often added new points to the end in his most dour moments. ‘I am an orphan with no parents, my lords - and they were of common blood. There is not a trace of noble title to any name I hold. I have no riches, only the kindness that my queen allows in providing for me and the coin I can make by hired deed. I have no lands, only a single shared room in the barracks of this castle, also provided by her Majesty. I’ve sworn my oath to my prince and could never betray that oath - my life will forever be devoted to him and his kingship, I -’

It is a slap to the face, Dream feels, to be stood in front of a foreign power and his own queen, the mother of the man he loves and has sworn to protect, and the man himself, listing all the reasons why he and George would never be together, despite Dream’s most ardent hopes.

Prince George watches his soon-to-be-knight speak. He sees how Dream’s face falls, his voice shakes, his shoulder curl in, even if no one else might. Dream, the prince felt, was like the sun. He shone so brightly that it often felt as if George might burn to a crisp when under Dream’s gaze. This felt like an eclipse - Dream being blacked out by some great weight that his words brought upon himself.

‘Enough.’ Prince George puts a stop to Dream’s words, his heart heavy. ‘You are dismissed.’

Sir Dream bows and beats a hasty exit, humiliated.

‘Sir Dream is my knight.’ The prince decrees when they are once again alone amongst themselves. ‘He is mine before he is anything else, even a member of this court. I do not permit him leaving my service to marry you.’

‘None of what he said matters to me.’ The princess argues, ‘Snowchester doesn’t care for titles and riches, only strength of character and of sword.’

‘None of what you say matters to *me*, I’m not releasing him from his oath and that’s that!’ Prince George shouts back, undeterred.

‘Enough.’ The Queen said shortly and they both fall silent. ‘Whether or not my son would allow it, Sir Dream did not consent to be wed. The matter is settled. I extend thanks to you both for visiting our kingdom, we have been honored by your visit. Unfortunately, I do not believe this match would bear any fruit.’

‘I fear I must agree.’ Snowchester’s First Husband concurs bitterly. With that, the Snowchester party retired for the night to rest for their travels in the morning.

The prince and his queen stared at each other for a long time, gazes stretching. After his initial shock, the Prince Consort had been content to be silent and watch. In this quietude, it was painfully obvious what the prince was saying.

He would not apologize, nor would he waiver on his decision.

“I believe I am disinclined toward these matchmaking opportunities.” The prince announced. “Please excuse me, I grow faint.”

The queen allows him leave, a dark presence at George’s back.

And thus the prince leaves his post to find his almost-knight.

Dream had sequestered himself away in his dorm, loyal Sapnap at his side to comfort him. Dream wept and was still weeping when George showed himself. Sapnap, with a frightful look, excused himself to give them privacy and left the prince and his kind-of-knight alone.

The prince joined Sir Dream on his bed but Sir Dream would not look at him. He could not bring himself to look at his prince. George was concerned - Dream often had a lot of feelings about a lot of things, but he rarely *cried* like this unless something was a rather big deal.

All George could do was sit with his friend, their sides pressed together, and hope that his presence could bring Dream comfort. Eventually, Dream is ready to speak.

“That sucked.” The soon-to-be-knight said.

“I know.” The prince is allowed to put an arm across Dream’s shoulders and he does so. They fit together, as they always do.

“I’ve never felt so ashamed.” Dream admits.

“You have no reason to be ashamed.” George said, affronted. “There is nothing shameful about you.”

“I knew I was punching up, but having to list exactly how high up was humiliating.” Dream continues.

“Punching up?” George was confused, unsure of what Dream could mean.

“There’s no need to play stupid!” Dream said with frustration, “Today can’t get anymore embarrassing, George. Everyone knows I’m in love with you. I understood that it would never work, I knew that! I didn’t need to say it in front of your parents and some strangers, though!”

More tears may fall as Dream said the words, but George paid them no mind. He hugged Dream and held him close when Dream came willingly. They are soulmates, after all, and though Dream was hurt, he was also in need of comfort and knew that George would not judge him for his feelings, unrequited as they may be.

George stroked Dream's hair and did his best to not join him in tears, for George was a sympathy crier.

Holding Dream, George was forced to truly consider the choice he'd made to not tell Dream about his feelings. All of the worries that held him back were very real, but his silence had resulted in Dream feeling as if his love would not be enough for George. Dream was feeling insecure and like he was less than, as if he wasn't the only person (aside from Sapnap) that George truly cared about, far above and beyond his silly crown and a kingdom he did not want.

In the face of that, it felt wrong to not tell Dream the truth.

The prince turned Dream's face up and wiped his tears.

'You haven't done anything wrong, to be crying like this.' The prince told Dream honestly. 'Nothing you said should bring you any shame. You've earned your place as my knight; you are loyal and true to me above any other. If you were not here, you'd have made a name and fortune for yourself and it's only because you instead swore yourself to me that you weren't able to.'

The words were true, but George felt that they were not enough.

'I'm proud to be your friend,' he continues. 'I'm proud to have somehow earned your devotion. I'm proud that you love me. I'm proud that I love *you*, though I'm sorry that I never told you that. I've been more concerned with thinking of the future and the life I can't give you than with making sure you knew that I cared for you. Being my queen would be a life completely different from the one you have now, and not in a good way.'

'You never said anything,' Dream said after a long, shocked pause.

'I wanted...I want to run away together first. From the castle, and the throne, and my parents. I wanted a simple life with the two of you. A farm or a fishery or whatever, just a life that means I can...hold your hand or kiss you without worrying about courtiers telling my parents on us! And then, once we were away from this awful castle, I was going to tell you.'

Dream did not know what to say. His heart was both trampled and lifting; disbelief and relief battling for domination of his mind.

'Most importantly.' The prince said bravely, 'I want a life where I can love you openly and fully, as you deserve. And I hope that you might still want that life with me, even after everything that's happened tonight.'

'I do.' Dream said, on instinct alone. He was still unsure of what was happening, but he knew that if this was his chance to be given George's heart, he did not want to lose it. He wanted the life his prince was describing. Life in the court, life on a farm - it did not matter to Sir Dream, so long as he could call George his.

When he said as such, he was met with a weak laugh.

‘I have been yours for as long as you have been mine.’ Prince George said. “You’re my soulmate, alongside Sapnap. Half of my heart. The three of us will be together for the rest of our lives, and then every life after that. And I’ll love you just as long.’

Dream wept again to hear the words spoken by his beloved. George was concerned that he had done wrong, but Sapnap’s untimely return distracted him from the worry.

‘He’s processing.’ Sapnap said blandly as he joined them on the bed.

‘Were you listening to us!?’ The prince demanded.

‘Yes.’ Sapnap replied without much fanfare, to which George could only admit that he was not surprised nor particularly bothered. This only saved him from having to tell Sapnap the full turn of events at a later time.

‘I’m glad you two managed to figure this out.’ Sapnap praised them, content to let the argument with George rest.

‘I thought we had, except that Dream is being a crybaby about the entire thing.’

‘I’m not!’ Sir Dream sobbed. Both Sapnap and George laughed, but did not deny him comfort despite their amusement.

When Dream was calm once again, he and his prince talked long into the night, Sapnap dozing at their side. Come morning, the Princess of Snowchester and her father left Kinoko to polite goodbyes from the royal family. With their carriage off, George disappeared from the royal party to meet Dream deep in the gardens, where their story had begun so many years ago.

Out of sight of courtiers and servants and the pressures of the throne, with only each other in the beautiful blooms, they held hands and walked the paths, content to be together no matter what the future held.

someone save us

Chapter Notes

Hello!!!

I'm sorry this one was a bit late. I wanted to give it its due and it ended up much longer than expected ajsdklf

this chapter in particular is a gift to Perseus for his birthday!! thank you so much for all the support with scarecrow <333 I hope u enjoy this sorta-wilbur-centric not!fic!

A GIANT thank u to Marrow, who beta'ed for me because I was not able to edit!!!! you are THE KINDEST SOUL and I appreciate you so much!!!!

Lastly, thank u to jess for betaing for me throughout the chapters!! even in this little not!fic series, u are putting in the Beta Work <3

and with this chapter, the scarecrow au comes to an end (at least until one of us finds something else we want to write in it). thank u so much to the ppl who have been with us on any part of this fic's journey! <3

Once upon a time, there was a great adventure. It was long and arduous, full of the things that all great adventures are full of - long walks and bickering, good food and merry fires, romance and dragon slaying (metaphorically). There were five boys who went on this adventure and by the time it came to a close, each was gravely changed in ways both good and bad. Still, they made it out together and alive and that is more than many adventurers are able to claim.

And, most importantly, the end of their adventure came with a gift: Mellon, the End Guardian, the one and only Ender Dragon. She was their happy ending, and the five of them enjoyed a long and prosperous life together, raising her to one day fulfill her duty.

Now, as with all tales, this adventure had many side characters. One such side character was named Wilbur Soot. It is in this tale that Wilbur finally comes into his own as - well. Not a main character, but certainly the love interest he'd once hoped to be.

But, first, some things must be explained.

You see, after the five were released from the Court of the Inbetween and escaped the Nether, the Blaze Empress was both impressed and vaguely irritated by the entire turn of events. She had spent a long time thinking of how best to gain an heir, and her plans had been foiled by a few smart tongues and the presence of a familiar, surprising egg, who's awakening had echoed in the empty shell where half of her heart once was.

With many of her of-age options either dead or escaped, the Empress set aside her desire for an heir as meaningless, in the end, for she had no plans to leave her throne anytime soon. Perhaps she'd look again in a few cycles, when a fresh batch of possible heirs was available.

So the Empress moved on with her near-infinite existence, and the thought of an heir left her mind. She was content with the knowledge that the egg had been awoken, for she knew both what it took for the being within that egg to at last prepare itself for life, and also that her old friend would be forced to look upon the rebirth of what had once been and would never again be hers.

And so, that great adventure ended and a simpler, kinder one began for the five heroes and the dragon they called daughter. For many decades, they lived together and raised her. Being mortals, their time did eventually come to hear the soft singing of the void calling them to the Other Side and, as all mortals must, they went. One by one, soon after each other to the last, the five were laid to rest, buried together in the grounds of the place they called home. Their daughter was distraught, as all children are when it is time to say goodbye to those that raised them for as long as they knew life, but she was not alone.

Mellon was, after all, soulbond to another. A side character in that first great adventure but a rather important catalyst to its second act; the heir to the Other Side and future King of the End, God of Death: Wilbur Soot.

As those decades passed and the five grew older, their mortality apparent in each gray hair and wrinkle and laugh line, Wilbur's immortality became more and more undeniable. He was still young when they were very old, and it was Wilbur who laid the last of the five to rest alongside his husband and dearest friends. It was Wilbur who closed the doors of their mansion, his soul mate's home, one last time.

Wilbur buried the five. Wilbur buried every mortal he'd ever cared about, eventually. Wilbur had a family, one he'd help build. There was his twin, Technoblade, and his younger brother, Tommy, and then Tubbo and Ranboo, who were not quite brothers but definitely kin. Tommy lived a full life, exploring the world alongside their father, helping when he could and causing mayhem whenever possible. Tubbo and Ranboo did eventually wed and had a son, Michael. Tubbo did not become King of Snowchester, but he did grow close with his sister, Genevieve, who won the crown, and both Tubbo and Ranboo became powerful and respected advisors to the throne.

Wilbur tried to convince them all to stay with him, to forgo the song of the Void and stay at his side. But Tommy was mortal and as the end of his life neared, he could not resist the call of one last adventure. Tubbo and Ranboo, having grown used to a stationary life after so long at court, could not resist, either. They'd all grown gray and hunched with age; they were mortal, while Wilbur was not. He remained untouched by time.

Wilbur was inherently selfish. He turned to his mother. He begged the Queen of the End to spare his brothers from the void, to allow them the same life his father enjoyed.

Kristin would have given her son almost anything, but she could not give him this. It was not hers to give. Even as her son pleaded and bargained, sobbed and raged, she could not grant

this to him. She had offered it to them herself, and she knew their answer as well as Wilbur did, in his heart of hearts.

Wilbur buried each of them, and wept and mourned, and escorted them to their rest, as was his duty as Prince of the End...and their elder brother. If he could not keep them, he would at least be the last friendly face to send them on the next step of their journey.

He did not speak to his mother for many years after, nor his father, nor his brother. He could not bring himself to say goodbye to Technoblade as he had the others.

It was, in fact, Technoblade who tracked him down and forced his family to reconcile. Wilbur was confused by Technoblade's presence at first - he did not appear particularly old, as he had the last time Wilbur saw him. Technoblade informed the run-away king-to-be that he had decided to stay at Wilbur's side, for a time, until he was more settled. After all, it was not right to separate twins.

With Techno's help, Wilbur and his parents reconciled. But reconciliation did not negate mortality.

The decades that had passed since that great adventure were not more than a drop in the bucket of Phil's life, but they were drops that raised the water level to the lip of said bucket. Phil and his wife, Kristin, Queen of the End and the Other Side, Goddess of Death, had long known that his life was mortal, as immortal as it appeared. He had escaped the call for many, many centuries, but even he could not escape forever. Their decision had been to wait until Phil could help escort the last of his mortal children to the Other Side, until he could no longer stand to be in the End without falling ill, as his ability to stay had shortened each time he visited. Then, at long last, the two of them would take the next journey together. Kristin was not mortal and would never be - all the two of them could do was hope that the Void would be kind to the little godling that had risen up when its creator grew mad with immortality, and recognize that she was choosing to give up her infinity to avoid that same fate.

Finally, it was only Technoblade, by sheer will and also saying 'yes' to Wilbur's proposal, who continued to live on at Wilbur's side. When Wilbur walked his father and his mother the Queen to the Void, Technoblade and Mellon both stayed at his side while they moved on.

'If, for some reason, you ever do see the Empress. Tell her I am waiting here with open arms, and I hope to see her again. I love you, my children,' The Goddess said, her final words. She kissed all three of them on the cheek, and they each received a warm, familiar hug from Phil, and then the two of them disappeared into the Void and Wilbur was officially King.

But that, my reader, is not where this tale begins. While Wilbur was laying his family to rest, there was a girl born, and *that* is who this tale is about.

The girl had a name and that name was Sally.

Sally was a salmon-hybrid, you see. An interesting lass, Sally had the makings of greatness. She was an alchemist, following in the footsteps of the great Karl Jacobs, whom she revered for much of her life, having grown up reading his works and studying his school of alchemy.

Her father, Watson, had been Karl's very last accepted student, after months of begging the elderly man to take him in. At that time, Karl had barely been able to practice, for his fingers had been bent and his vision nearly gone, but he'd still been lively enough to order a student around and Watson - a young, single soon-to-be-father - was eager to learn.

Watson was also indebted to Karl for more than just taking him on as a student. Watson had been pregnant for the entire time that he had studied under Karl and, when Sally was born, it was Karl that saved her life. There were not many hybrids like Sally - most did not survive birth. It was difficult, after all, to prepare for a child who could not breathe air. When Sally had been born, it had been with gills. It was only Karl's quick thinking and his alchemical skills that allowed him to create enough water to submerge Sally in before she'd asphyxiated. It was also Karl who'd helped her father rig up a contraption that allowed Sally to live on land; it fit around her neck like a choker, a thin strap along the front and back, with two larger pads expanding along the sides. The pads then covered Sally's gills, an airtight pocket continually filled with water from a modified infinite water enchantment.

Sally had no memories of Karl, though he was her idol in many ways. He had died shortly after Sally was born, nearly three decades prior to the tale now being told; but he had not left the world empty-handed. During his long life, Karl had authored many stories. Some were fairy tales and collected fables, others were more complex academic works, and some were somewhere in between. He'd left these works scattered throughout his library, which he'd located in what had been a small village close to his home when he'd been alive. Since his death, his library had become a favorite tourist attraction to any and all would-be academics interested in the romantic past that Karl often wrote about in his books. Sally was one such would-be academic, and she'd read every book in Karl's library at least three times over. Her favorite, though, was not a book that *could* be found in that library.

No, her favorite was the diary that had been left to her in Karl's will. It was a tale of a great adventure, entitled *Scarecrow* .

It must be known that during that great adventure mentioned so often, Karl was one of the five boys that fate brought together. During this adventure, Karl swore to an Angel of Death that he would never reveal the truth of what he had experienced. Unfortunately for that angel, Karl was an experienced and exuberant liar and, later in life, he had written quite the tell-all. It had been bequeathed to Sally upon Karl's death and his widowers had not challenged the will, perhaps sensing that they would not be long for the world themselves, and she'd read every word so many times that she'd had the whole thing memorized by the time most children were learning their letters.

The Scarecrow Diary told Sally of worlds beyond her imagination. Two entire realms, reachable by portal - reachable by *Sally* , most importantly. Sally had long dreamed of visiting both the End and the Nether, though Karl had warned that both were hellish, bewitching places. Sally wanted to see what Karl had seen; she wanted to experience all three realms for herself.

Growing up, Watson had warned Sally away from running with these wild fantasies. Neither realm was particularly hospitable, he'd always say, particularly to those such as Sally, who had a *condition* .

Of course, Sally ignored him. And, as this would not be a very interesting tale if that were Watson's only concern, of course there was more to the story than Watson was willing to tell his daughter.

You see, readers, life - in particular *Sally's* life - was a bit more complicated than that.

It had started, as one might have guessed, with the wild magic of the Nether finding a failing fish hybrid as an infant and giving it another chance, with the promise that the magic would call upon this hybrid one day, should it sense greatness.

That fish hybrid had grown up to be charming and lovely, always with a flirty wink or smile - and that hybrid was named Watson. As a young man, Watson had been quite the catch, with an audacity he would one day pass on to his daughter. As the magic had promised, it did call upon Watson when he turned of age and he began to yearn for *home*.

Watson had traveled to the Nether, intent on making a deal with the Empress in order to return to his life in the overworld. Where other strays were scared by the process of becoming a Vex, or were angry that they were called, Watson was always ready for a fun time and had thought that the entire experience was rather interesting, though not exactly how he pictured his early twenties going.

Either way, Watson had traveled to the Inbetween and was given audience with the Blaze Empress. Watson had been prepared to sacrifice quite a few things; he had deals upon deals lined up. But, upon seeing the Blaze Empress, those deals fell away and Watson was left dumbstruck by her majesty.

While some men might have shied away from the challenge before him - a goddess, an empress, an eternal being who has seen stars rise and fall countless times, the frostiest stare that ever did exist - Watson was not such a man. When the Blaze Empress asked him what deal Watson would make, if he was choosing to not become a Vex, Watson had gathered the courage to offer a deal that no other in all of history had dared to offer before - not even Kristin, once upon a distant past.

'My Empress,' Watson had said, 'I would ask that you allow me the honor of courting you.'

The Court had been appalled; it was a truly unheard-of request. The Empress was not impressed.

'You are mortal.' She had said, perhaps snidely if she were not an empress. 'You might court me for an eternity, and yet I would not look your way.'

'Give me one year and one day, your Majesty,' Watson had bargained, 'If you do not love me in one year and one day, I will join your court.'

'You are a proud one.' The Empress had frowned at him. 'Impudent.'

'I prefer the term 'brave'.' Watson had said.

The Empress had stood quiet for a long moment, thinking over the request. Finally, she had nodded.

‘I shall allow your request,’ The Empress had eventually decided. She had balanced between her distaste for humanity and amusement at the request and eventually fell on the side of amusement, as enough mortals had proven interesting that she was beginning to rethink her distaste for them. ‘And, should you fail, you will become my Vex.’

‘Agreed,’ Watson had said and the deal had been struck.

Like all other stories of goddesses and the mortals they grew to love (of which there was only one other set) the specifics of how they fell in love are not known, not even to the recorder of this story. It is only known that they did, indeed, during that one year and one day, grow to feel genuine affection for each other. The Empress was not easy to love; she was otherworldly and uninterested in making herself similar to mortals. But Watson was determined and ardent and he grew to see her not as an Empress or a goddess, but as a person who was very, very alone.

And so, when the day after one year and one day arrived, the two had once again stood across from each other.

‘I do believe I have won our wager,” Watson had said.

‘You did,’ The Empress had agreed, though it might have pained her to admit. ‘You are freed from your duty to this court.’

‘I’d like to stay,’ Watson had said, ‘if you’ll have me, your Majesty. Allow me to become a Vex and stay at your side.’

And though the Empress had wanted to say yes, she could not. Watson, she knew, would not be who he was if he became one of her Vex. She had fallen for him as a mortal man. And he would not love her just as he did, were he to give up his mortality. Perhaps, in a different life, they could have had something similar to Kristin and her consort, where Watson kept his mortality but acted as an Angel for the Empress’ will in the overworld. But the Empress was not a fool and she never made the same mistake twice. She’d loved a mortal before, and they had been stolen from her by Kristin’s pettiness. In much the same way that the Empress would have snuffed the queen’s consort of his life as an infant if she’d known who he would one day be to Kristin, the Empress knew that were she to take Watson as her consort, Kristin would not rest until he was dead and out of her reach forever.

‘Those were not the conditions of our deal,’ The Empress had announced, stepping away from Watson’s outstretched hands. ‘You will return to the overworld and the life of a mortal. This is what must be done.’

‘Your Majesty...’ Watson had begged, heartbroken, but the Empress would hear no more of his words on the matter.

When Watson finally admitted to himself that his tears and his pleas would not sway her, he had instead asked for something he could keep to remember her by. She was his Empress,

after all, and he was being exiled from the home he had come to love and the side of the goddess he would never move on from.

The Empress, softened by her feelings, had allowed the request. She had expected him to ask for the other half of her heart, as she'd once given Kristin.

Instead, Watson asked for a child.

The Empress had warned that Watson would bear the child. That the child would be of her and would remind him of her and his lost home often. That the child would likely experience difficulties, being of her magic, and Watson would have no easy time raising their offspring in the overworld. Despite the warnings, Watson had been insistent. He wanted a child.

The Empress had granted his request. She told Watson that, to ease his burdens, he should seek out a great alchemist by the name of Karl Jacobs. He was a stray who had once escaped the Empress' grasp, and he was now an accomplished scholar with a wide variety of enchantments and tools that might help their child thrive. He, the Empress explained, was as close to a sibling as this child was likely to ever have - her almost-heir. The Empress knew he would take pity on Watson and their child and would help him, when the child was born.

And that was how Watson came to find Karl and beg to be his student, though Karl was close to the end of his life and could not give Watson the sort of education that earlier students received. As the Empress had predicted, Karl took pity on the man and his daughter and saved her life when the time came.

Sally, of course, knew very little of this story. As far as she knew, her mother had been a woman of beauty and grace who had swept her father off his feet in a whirlwind romance. As told by Watson, her mother was no longer of this realm. Sally had always taken that to mean that she was dead.

Sally grew up with Watson, who adored her above all else and often told her stories of when he and her mother were together, and with Karl's stories and his diary. She learned all that she could from both of them, and improved on many of the designs Karl had left behind. She fixed her own breathing apparatus and re-enchanted it weekly all on her own; Sally was an accomplished linguist, speaking common, demonic, and the old language of Kinoko, and had a love of numbers. Growing up, she made quite the pretty penny working as a traveling accountant while in bigger cities and towns.

Sally was accomplished and driven, intelligent and disciplined, adventurous and stubborn. And though she loved the life she built for herself as she grew up and left the protection of her father to explore the world, she never could forget the stories of different realms or her childhood dream of visiting them.

And one day - a random day with no real importance except that it happened to be a day where Sally's wanderlust got the better of her - Sally packed her travel bag, kissed Watson on the cheek, and told him she'd be back in a few weeks' time. She took the Scarecrow Diary with her and set off to fulfill her dream, though she only left a note for Watson to find later that told the truth of this journey.

Sally wanted an adventure, the adventure she'd been craving since she was a young child; she wanted to follow in Karl's footsteps to see the world he had written so much about on his adventures with his friends.

Her first stop, because it was closest, was the Holy Lands. It was difficult to book passage to these Holy Lands - Karl's directions were vague and Sally had to charter a small ship all on her own. Her journey took her weeks, much longer than the timeline she'd given her father, and the sea was unforgiving.

But, weeks after setting out, when Sally was on the cusp of simply diving into the sea and hoping her instincts take over from there, she found the islands that Karl had spoken of in his diary.

From there, it was not so hard to find the ancient stronghold, to follow the steps down, down, down - and to find the portal to the End and the Other Side.

The End was mostly empty, actually. When Sally went through the portal, there was no one on the other side. She wandered great hallways and ultimately ended up in a library, where she stumbled upon a man in plain clothes, with a shock of white in his hair and wire-frame glasses, who looked as surprised to see her as she was to see him.

'And who are you, exactly?' Sally asked.

'The librarian,' The man answered, 'And who are you?'

'My name is Sally,' Sally said. 'I've come to explore the End.'

'How did you find this place?' The librarian demanded. 'You're not meant to be here!'

'Well, I'll hardly tell you if you're being so *rude* about it.' Sally said crossly. 'I don't even know your name!'

'My name is-' the librarian stumbled over a pile of books and landed in a pile. Sally watched, amused, as he pulled himself up and brushed the dust off a book from the floor. The librarian looked at the book, closed it, gazed upon the cover, and then set it aside. 'My name is Ozymandias.'

'That's rather a long one,' Sally said. 'I'll call you Oz, I think.'

The librarian - Oz - could only blink at her.

Sally spent a long, long time grilling Oz for every lick of information she could glean from him. She wanted to know about the End and the Other Side. She pulled Karl's diary out, which had new pages of her own notes stuck between his pages, and she recorded everything Oz reluctantly told her after some casual and friendly bullying. She could tell that this Oz was not used to speaking to pretty girls, and Sally was quite the pretty girl.

At one point, Oz asked about the diary and Sally, with stars in her eyes, expanded upon Karl Jacobs and her admiration of him. When Oz scoffed, Sally gave him a very firm, very

detailed explanation about why Karl Jacobs was the most important scholar of their time and anyone who didn't respect that was obviously not very educated at all.

Now, dear reader, please flip your perspective.

Wilbur, King of the End and the Other Side, God of Death, had been minding his library, having sent many of the endermen in his castle off long ago to spend time doing what endermen do when they are not serving their king. He'd been thinking about his brother and his dragon having gone off to explore a newly developed End city, flipping through the pages of his favorite stories, when a random girl had walked into his library.

Wilbur hadn't seen a mortal since his mother and father had moved on and he had accepted his crown - and Technoblade didn't count.

It was quite the shock. He'd panicked, as he was wont to do, and given her a bit of a fib about who he was. Even after so many decades being alive, Wilbur's training as a prince had been as a mortal one and Phil had taught him to lie when he was unsure - and he had been quite unsure about this strange woman with fiery red hair and scales on her skin suddenly appearing and demanding answers.

And then, of course, it made sense. She'd been following a literary map penned by none other than the original thorn in his side.

Somehow, from beyond the fucking grave, Karl Jacobs had managed to cause Wilbur endless trouble. Wasn't the humiliation he'd caused Wilbur in life enough? Must he continue his apparently never-ending quest to cause Wilbur suffering even post mortem?

Her name was Sally. She is, Wilbur managed to understand, a salmon hybrid, which explained the breathing apparatus around her neck. It was a work of genius, Wilbur must admit, but what Wilbur could not help but notice, and what gave him so much pause that Sally was able to extract quite a lot of information from him in his shock, was that every nerve Wilbur has in his body was screaming that Sally is a Vex. But Sally, Wilbur could plainly see, was not a Vex, nor did she act like one.

'I'd like to spend some time here.' Sally said. 'Do you think you could put in a good word for me with this king of yours, Oz?'

'What?' Wilbur said dumbly.

'I'm asking you to do me a favor, bookworm.' Sally sighed. 'I want to stay and learn about this place. At least for a few days!'

'That's impossible.' Wilbur said plainly, but Sally seemed very disappointed by the words.

'Is your king a grump, then? Does he hate a woman only looking to educate herself and grow more aware of the world that exists around her?'

'No!'

‘Well, then, I don’t see what the problem would be. It’s not as if there’s anyone else running around this place, it’d be like I’m not even here!’

‘That’s not the point.’ Wilbur stumbled over his words. ‘It’s that it’s dangerous for mortals here!’

‘I feel just fine,’ Sally laughed. ‘So please try to talk the man into letting me stay for a bit. Pretty please?’

She batted her lashes at him. Wilbur hadn’t had anyone bat their lashes at him in a long, long time. Wilbur found that his face was hot.

‘I can see what I can do,’ he said.

‘There’s a good lad.’ Sally patted his shoulder. It had been an age since anyone called him a "lad", and an even longer time since he was considered 'good'. It’d been a much, *much*, longer time since anyone but Techno or Mellon had touched him, too. Wilbur was beginning to realize that he was severely starved for attention and it had resulted in this strange woman taking advantage of him in his own library.

Wilbur told himself that he allowed Sally to stay because he was very curious about why his senses told him that he was allowing a full-blooded Vex within his halls. He told himself that it was because he was interested in talking with a mortal again, after so long, and because it wasn’t often that he got the chance to hear about what was going on in the outside world except through reading some death tales every now and then. Wilbur enjoyed reading, but he wasn’t like his mother. He did not adore this library the way she did.

Sally, on the other hand, grew almost incandescent. Wilbur warned her that she would never read everything within the walls of his castle, so she bluntly told him to go pick out the best bits for her.

Somehow, Wilbur found himself doing so. He conveniently forgot to grab Karl’s book every time she asked for it.

Sally called him Oz. Wilbur found that he didn’t mind it; it wasn’t his name, but, then again, he wasn’t truly a librarian, either.

And so, the two spent the day within the library. Wilbur showed her the librarian’s quarters and demurred when she softened from the bull in a china shop mentality she’d been on all day, guilty for stealing what she believed was his bed. But he did not sleep, after all. He stayed in the library while she rested, flipping through random books in the hopes of distracting himself from his thoughts.

The next few days, Sally explored the library with Wilbur - now Oz - at her side, directing her to where she asked to go and answering questions as she asked them. Wilbur did not want to admit that he was lonely, but he very much was, and he did not have his brother or his dragon around to remind him of what a bad idea it was to let a smart, pretty person lead him around by the nose.

When Sally asked to see the rest of the castle, a few days after she arrived, Wilbur said okay and gave her a tour.

Days turned to a week, and then two. When she began to fret, Wilbur assured her that time was slowed in the End - she had only been gone a handful of days in the overworld. It was reassuring, and Sally found that she didn't mind staying longer. Karl had been right in his diary - the End was *endlessly* fascinating and the knowledge to be found within the castle was without bounds. She'd also begun to take a liking to this Oz, awkward and obviously shut in as he was. He was funny and charming in his own way, and held a heaviness on his shoulders that Sally didn't quite understand but found herself interested in learning about.

Neither of them were quite willing to admit that they've developed a bit of a crush on the other - but there was not exactly a rush to these things, there in the End, and both came to be content in sitting together and reading, or telling stories of their lives. Sally learned that Oz was not always in the End - he'd lived an entire life outside of this realm; he'd grown up in the overworld, like she had! And he had been all over, even more places than her, and he'd learned so much about so many things. She could sit and pick his brain for eternity, she felt, and there would always be something new to learn. Once, she asked about his family, and a shadow passed over his face as he explained that once, he had four, and now he has only one. Sally turned her attention after that to different, less painful topics, and watched Oz's face light up once again. In return, Wilbur felt that Sally was similar to a fresh breeze when you've been stuck in a stuffy room. She was always ready with a joke or a laugh, to bully him out of his thoughts when he dug too deep or to ask him some question that brought him out of his memories and into a conversation. She had much to tell him about the world as it was now, advancements and other some such marks of progressing society.

The two spent hours, days talking as they walked the castle or grounds, explored the library, and learned about each other and the realms.

The only thing that Wilbur would not talk about and that Sally could not push Oz into revealing was more about the Nether and the Empress. Wilbur did not want to encourage Sally to go to that hellscape, though he knew he could not forbid her - least of all because she was not one of his subjects, and most of all because he knew that it would drive her directly into the fire due to her annoyingly oppositional nature. Ultimately, Sally set it aside as a lost cause and focused on learning about the End. She felt that information which might be gained about the Nether would be helpful, but it was not a necessity yet. Besides, she liked spending time with Oz and liked his smile - talk of her leaving or of the Nether did not make him smile.

And so, the two of them became fast friends and something between them bloomed. It was far too soon to call it love, surely, but it was not too far off from it and had all the makings of one day developing into more.

The adventurous girl who paused her journey and the king-turned-librarian spent some weeks together, and it was a special time for them both. With each day, Wilbur knew that he needed to come clean about who he really was, but he found that he did not want to. He liked being Oz with Sally. He had wanted the crown he now wore for his entire life, but it was only after

it had been placed that he realized how truly heavy it was. Wilbur liked that he could set it aside to be with her, and he did not relish having to pick it up again once the truth was out.

And yet, all things must come to an end. Wilbur had hoped to catch Mellon and Technoblade upon their return, explain the situation to them and ask them to assist him in his farce - but, alas, he did not catch them nearly in time, because he'd gone to the kitchens to fetch tea and a few biscuits to snack on.

He heard Mellon long before he saw her. Their range is far, after so long together - but not so far that he could make it all the way from the kitchens to the throne room, where Mellon and Technoblade entered, before Sally.

Wilbur left the tea and biscuits and bolted, but he was not quick enough. When he reached the throne room, it was to see Sally curtsying politely to Technoblade, who still sat upon Mellon's back.

'Wilbur,' Mellon thought, 'There is a rather Vex girl in our throne room. Should I eat her?'

'NO!' Wilbur said out loud, shocking all three of them into staring at him.

'Oh, Oz!' Sally explained, 'You're back just in time. The king has returned.'

'Oz?' Mellon said out loud, or an approximation.

'King?' Technoblade said with disgust.

'Sally,' Wilbur said carefully, 'there's some stuff I feel I should be honest with you about.'

Now here, my reader, was the crux of the issue. Both Sally and Wilbur had very big personalities. Neither was particularly good about backing down, nor had either of them taken lessons in de-escalation. What should have been a calm, if perhaps emotionally charged, conversation about the lies we tell when we are surprised, did not stay a calm conversation.

Sally felt betrayed. She'd spent the last weeks with someone who she'd grown very fond of, only to find out quite suddenly that there was rather quite a lot about him that had been kept from her - and that he had actively lied! She felt like there had been quite the farce at play, and she had been made to look silly.

Wilbur felt misunderstood. A stranger had shown up in his lonely little library and he'd responded on instinct - and then he'd been very caught up in her questions and showing her around his home, it hadn't seemed *relevant* that he also happened to be the king. Once, Wilbur would have opened with that fact but he had learned long ago - just about a century, in fact - that being royalty with dominion over death itself was not all that much of a saving grace when it came to being *liked*. He'd liked that Sally saw him for himself and did not fear him.

He did not like being snapped at, though, and his pride was hurt. Wilbur was defensive by nature and Sally was offensive by nature when angry - the two quickly found themselves in

quite the argument.

Hoping to put an end to it and gain the winning hand, Wilbur announced with all of the pomp of a king on his throne: 'I am the king of this realm! I don't owe anything to you, least of all my name or my identity! You're just a random girl who broke into my castle, what right do you have to demand anything of me?'

'A random girl am I?' Sally demanded, not at all cowed by Wilbur's straightened spine or stiffened shoulders, though she was rather shorter than him and did not strike quite the same intimidating pose. 'Well! This random girl has put off an entire half of her adventure to spend time in this castle! I don't have time for liars or for silly little kings with their silly little crowns telling me what I do and do not have rights to! I'm leaving, Ozymandias or Wilbur or *whatever* your name is!'

And, with that, Sally turned and disappeared from the throne room in quite the huff.

'What just happened?' Mellon asked.

Wilbur guiltily explained what had occurred during their absence. At the end of his explanation, Mellon could only shake her head.

'How did you manage to fumble the bag *again*?' Technoblade exclaimed.

Wilbur could not defend himself. No longer in the heat of the argument, Wilbur came to regret his words and realized that he needed to apologize. He'd come to very much enjoy Sally's company, and knew that he would not get a second chance.

But when Wilbur went to look for Sally, he found that she was already gone.

Sally, after all, had learned the castle well in the last few weeks. She knew it as well as any did and she had not wasted any time in gathering her things from the librarian's quarters and making her way back to the portal that she had come through.

She left without a backward glance, for Sally knew she could not let herself hesitate or she would find reason to stay and see if Oz - or Wilbur, now - would come to apologize. She threw herself through the portal. Sally left the stronghold and made her way back to the beach, unwilling to let herself cry over spilled milk (or, in this case, lying kings).

She found her boat where she had left it, dusted off the seat of sand and grime, and set back out to sea.

Sally spent the next weeks at sea, once again. She returned to the Badlands after a harrowing journey, sent a letter off to her father explaining where she had been for the last few weeks (Wilbur, at least, had not lied about this and her absence from the world as not nearly so long as her time in the End), and bought a ticket for passage to Kinoko. That was where Karl's journey took her, and she put thought of Wilbur from her mind and focused on that, instead. After all, she did not start this journey to meet a cute librarian with nice eyes and curly hair and a good smile and a charming wit and - no, she did not. She started this journey to live out her childhood dreams, and she still had an entire realm to explore.

Sally made her way to Kinoko, and it was mostly a slow journey that gave her time to refuse to think about Wilbur. Instead, she spent her days bothering a group of very obvious bandits hitching a ride to Kinoko, where banditing has seen quite the uptick in the new age. A series of wacky hijinks and going head-to-head with their leader on a boat took up most of Sally's energy and resulted in her sending them running the moment they reached land.

Sally arrived in Kinoko unscathed despite their best efforts, then eventually reached the royal birch forest. Deep within the forest, Sally found a portal not unlike the one that brought her to the End. It was vertical where that one was horizontal, and this one had no shimmering pool to fall into. It was empty. When Sally stuck a hand through, nothing happened.

Sally made camp, unsure what else to do as night fell. By chance, an ember from her fire drifted toward the portal. The spark caught the deep obsidian. In only a split-second, the portal was lit. It sounded like the souls of the damned waited on the other side.

Uncertain but knowing it was far too late to back out now, Sally stepped through the portal and into the Nether.

The Nether was hot and red; these were Sally's only impressions of the realm before there was a clap of sound not unlike thunder and suddenly the world was *white*, instead.

'Sally!' a familiar voice said and then Sally was being hugged by a familiar person - her father, Watson.

Watson explained that he'd been in the Nether for quite a long time, months even, waiting for her. He'd thought she'd come here first, but she had never showed up and it had terrified him to his core because the End was not a realm that he was welcome in, if he'd even been able to figure out how to get there.

Sally was very confused, but relieved to see her dad. She had so much to tell him, and she wanted to rant about Wilbur and the End and, most importantly, cry in his arms while he told her how big of an idiot the End King was.

She did not get that chance though. Watson only had a moment to hold her before he was whisking her off to see the Empress and stop the upcoming war.

'*War*?' Sally demanded.

'We thought you'd been kidnapped!' her father explained. 'Of course the Empress was going to go to war.'

And so, Sally was presented to the Empress - her mother.

The Empress was an imposing figure. She was tall, towering far above what made any logical sense. When she approached Sally, though, she seemed to shrink until they were nearly the same height. Somehow, it felt more like the Empress' power had condensed so that she was just as *large*, in presence if not physically.

‘My child,’ The Empress said, and though she had called many Vex by that epitaph, it had never been more accurate. ‘You’re not a hostage.’

‘I’m not,’ Sally agreed.

‘Did you escape?’ The Empress asked.

‘I was never a hostage,’ Sally explained shortly. ‘I was only visiting, and then I left and came here of my own will. That sorry excuse of a king couldn’t hope to contain me if he’d ever had the balls to try.’

‘Sally,’ her dad said, long-suffering.

‘That is good to know,’ The Empress said, neutrality clear on her face. She was impossible to read, though Sally tried. The three of them stood together, an uncertainty in her father that Sally was not used to seeing and an odd sort of atmosphere forming in the cracks of their broken family.

‘Did you say *king*?’ Watson suddenly asked, and finally, the Empress’ face shifted - it wasn’t by much, but it was enough to notice, and Sally did not think it was a good expression, whatever it was.

Sally would have explained more but there was an interruption - two Vex brought forth an intruder who had snuck through the Nether and found his way to the castle.

Technoblade.

What followed was a series of interjections by Sally, Watson, and Technoblade. They argued in circles, unclear about who was who and what was going on until the Empress clapped and brought about silence.

‘It seems as if there has been no kidnapping. And, touched as he may be by the Allay, this piglin is no enemy of mine and so is welcome in my Court,’ The Empress decreed. ‘I will call off the invasion.’

‘*Invasion* !?’ Techno asked.

‘Invasion,’ Watson confirmed

Sally finally grew fed up.

‘I want to leave,’ she declared. ‘Let me go back to the overworld right now!’

‘But-’ Watson and Techno both protested, but Sally was done hearing anyone out. She had recently discovered, after all, that she had been *lied to* her entire life and she needed space to think about it. She did not want to hear what either her father or Wilbur’s brother had to say, she only wanted to leave and come to terms with things on her own.

‘Is that your wish?’ The Empress asked, unmoved.

‘ *Yes!* ’ Sally said, though she was suddenly unsure. She would not back down though and, between one moment and the next, Sally was back in the birch forest.

Sally did not have much of a campsite at the portal so, without hesitation, she swept away from the whole area.

Alas, it was a mistake to be so hasty. Rather than paying any attention to her surroundings, Sally was lost in her confusion.. She was very resourceful and intelligent, but she was not overly strong of muscle. Despite her big personality and stubborn nature, she was just a fish lady running around a country she had never visited before.

It wasn’t long after she’d fled the birch forest that she ran into a familiar crew of would-be bandits intent on finding her. They’d only been looking for revenge, nothing more serious than perhaps a fight in the woods and a scar as a warning - but this is a story, after all, and what is a story without uncanny timing. You see, Sally had not taken much time to think about things when she’d left the port city of Targay to come to the birch forest outlined in Karl’s diary. She had forgotten something very important.

During the fight, Sally’s enchantment ran out. Landlocked and alone, with a group of panicked bandits standing around her, Sally did not have the time or the air to fix her enchantment.

Sally, my reader, died there, on the forest floor.

You may imagine how Wilbur felt, when her book appeared on his desk, the final page written. It was an agony, of sorts. A brutal agony. He’d sent Technoblade to find her, in hopes that his twin could convince her to return to the End so Wilbur could apologize. Wilbur had learned the importance of a good apology, in the years since he’d lost his first love, and he knew that there was something different about Sally, something that called to him. He did not want to run her off as he’d done his first love.

So, when her book appeared and Wilbur knew every word etched into every page, the grief was powerful. Suddenly, he knew her story - he knew who she was, *what* she was, and why she pinged as Vex to him. The idea that he’d harbored the Empress’ heir, which had sparked so much suffering nearly a century ago - that he’d fallen so hard for her - was inconceivable. And yet, he did conceive it, because it was right in front of him.

By all rights, Sally was Wilbur’s enemy. But he did not think of her as an enemy, but as a friend. As someone whom he felt connected to. As someone who, if he had not scared her away with his hubris, might have one day loved him back as he loved them.

Wilbur knew that she was no more mortal than she was immortal, like him; when he cradled her spark and saw her soul, he knew that it was his duty to send her on. As a king and a god of death, Wilbur had no right to pick and choose who was allowed a second chance and who was not, especially not without a deal.

But Wilbur was inherently selfish and he loved her. Wilbur could not find it in himself to let her story end like this. He could not invite her into his court, nor did he have a deal to be

struck - and still, he sent her soul back to her body and ripped open the binding of her book to make room for new, fresh pages.

Sally awakened in her father's arms.

Watson cradled his child, crying, a mournful Techno over his shoulder. Sally would have liked to comfort him, perhaps, but she could only begin choking once again, as her enchantment was still un-done.

Watson, though shocked, was a good man under pressure. Though he did not understand how his daughter had come back from death - he had found her, after all, alone in the woods, cold without her spark - he quickly enchanted her breathing apparatus again and Sally, miraculously, could breathe.

'What the *fuck* ,' Sally gasped.

'You're alive!' Watson sobbed, 'Oh, Sally, I'm so sorry! I never meant for any of this to happen, but you've come back to me!'

'Yes,' Sally said, 'I have. And you know what? That sorry bastard did not even say *hello* to me before he tossed me back out!'

' *What ?*' Watson asked, confused and relieved in equal measure. Perhaps his daughter had not been brought back with sense?

'I have to go back to the End,' Sally declared, getting up and brushing the leaves from her dress, 'I have quite a word to give to that king of theirs. He didn't even *apologize* , dad! I was dead in his hands and he didn't even have a word of sorry!'

'Maybe he was saving it for in-person,' Technoblade said loyalty, though he inwardly was not certain that his words were true.

'I don't understand what you're talking about,' Watson said, still rather tearful.

'Well, I met a boy,' Sally said. 'And we became good friends, actually, except it turned out that his name wasn't Oz, at all! It was *Wilbur* , and he was a king, not a librarian! So you can see why I was a bit peeved. And then he had the gall to try to tell me I was overreacting, dad! So I left, because I'll not be condescended to, least of all by some sad sprout of a man.'

'My love,' Watson said, 'you've just *died* and he brought you back. I'd think that was an apology.'

'Well, I demand a verbal one, too,' Sally said firmly. 'Actions may speak louder than words, but words aren't exactly silent, either!'

'Okay.' Watson gave up, because he knew from experience that Sally could argue until she was blue in the face and, as she'd just suffocated to death, he wanted to give her poor lungs a break. 'Let's go see him, then.'

To go all the way back to the End portal by foot would be a long journey, so Technoblade suggested that they ask the Empress for a transport. Watson was nervous, not wanting to impose upon her hospitality any more than he already had. After all, he'd nearly whipped the entire Nether into a frenzy with the idea that the End had stolen the Empress' only daughter, which had turned out to be very false.

Sally, though, decided that it couldn't hurt to ask, so she led them back through the portal. They quickly found themselves back at the castle of the Inbetween, the Empress awaiting them in the courtyard.

'You've returned, daughter,' The Empress said.

'I have a favor.' Sally curtsied politely. 'Could you send us to the stronghold so that I can visit the End King?'

'A bold request.' The Empress raised a brow. 'Why?'

'He didn't apologize before bringing me back to life.' Sally frowned back at her, 'Can you imagine?'

'Yes,' The Empress said drolly. 'I can.'

'So that's why,' Sally said.

'Not for any other reason?' the Empress asked, brow still raised.

'No,' Sally denied, though she wasn't very sure if her words were the honest truth or not.

'Go then,' The Empress allowed, 'I will transport you.'

'And after,' Sally added before the Empress could snap her fingers, 'I'll come back. We can talk. I'd like to talk to...meet you properly.'

'Perhaps,' The Empress agreed, and then she snapped her fingers.

Sally found herself on the beach, Technoblade at her side and looking a bit frazzled.

'You're not a simple woman,' he said by way of explanation, and Sally had to laugh.

They found their way to the stronghold, and then the portal. Finally, Sally found herself back within the End, standing in the throne room.

When Wilbur rushed through the door, his first words were, 'You're back!'

Sally was filled with righteous irritation. 'Would you rather I leave again, then!'

'NO!' Wilbur exclaimed. 'That wasn't at all what I meant.'

'Well, I've come to demand an apology. TWO apologies, even!' Sally said boldly.

'*Apology*?' Wilbur frowned. 'I was saving your life!'

‘Well, you didn’t even sit me down to have a cup of tea and discuss my options!’ Sally pulled Karl’s diary out and waved it in Wilbur’s face. ‘I expect to be treated with some respect, Wilbur, especially after you lied to me! There wasn’t a biscuit in sight in that revival!’

‘Karl *Jacobs* ,’ Wilbur cursed. ‘Even in death, he complicates my life!’

And as the two argued, they drew closer and closer. Technoblade, who honestly had not had to do too much in this mission to return Sally to the End, left to find Mellon and fill her in on the juicy details, giving his brother privacy and simply having faith that he would not royally screw up again.

Eventually, Sally and Wilbur’s bickering brought them within arm’s length, and then closer, until Wilbur was able to wrap his arms around her and pull her into a hug even as she continued to argue with him. Their hug was a well-crafted one. Wilbur held her close, dipping his face to breathe in her hair. Sally’s heart skipped in her chest. She found herself hugging him back.

‘I’m sorry,’ Wilbur finally found the strength to say. ‘I shouldn’t have used my status to try to win an argument or lied to you about who I was or my name. And I should have crafted a better revival, perhaps with biscuits. I swear to remember them the next time your soul finds its way into my hands.’

‘You’d better,’ Sally accepted. ‘With how my luck’s been lately, I’ll probably end up there a time or two more.’

Wilbur held her tighter. ‘I’d rather you not. I like you better alive.’

‘Ironical,’ Sally smiled, ‘for the king of death to say.’

‘I’m contradictory, it’s part of my charm,’ Wilbur said, and Sally found herself laughing despite her previous upset. She found that she could admit that she’d missed him very much the last few weeks. She had not known Oz long, but never had Sally felt as understood and seen as when she’d spent the weeks in this castle with Wilbur. Sally hadn’t exactly regretted leaving, but she’d certainly wished, once in every while, that things had happened just a bit differently.

But despite that fight, they’d found their way back to each other. Even in the most enjoyable parts of Sally’s journey, she’d missed Wilbur. She’d wanted to talk to him again, even if only to yell at him for being an idiot some more.

‘Your charm is rather lacking,’ Sally sighed mournfully. ‘You’re lucky the bullied nerd aura worked on me.’

‘Worked, did it?’ Wilbur allowed the slight, instead focusing on where he had the advantage. ‘Are you saying I’ve charmed you?’

‘You’ve opened the possibility of one day charming me,’ Sally corrected. ‘I’m no wilting princess to fall for the first sweet words to come my way.’

‘No,’ Wilbur agreed. ‘You’re certainly some kind of princess, but it’s definitely not wilting.’

Sally smiled, but the words also stirred a feeling of anxiety within her.

‘Oh, gods,’ Sally said. ‘I really am a princess, aren’t I? Of some sort.’

‘The same sort that made me a prince makes you a princess.’ Wilbur shrugged. ‘Part god, given to a human.’

‘It’s unfair that you read my book,’ Sally said, ‘that’s like cheating, isn’t it? You got a head start on me.’

‘You had Karl’s stupid diary,’ Wilbur said. ‘This only makes us equal, since you got to see me in my worst time.’

‘What?’ Sally stared up at him. At some point, they’d started to dance - a slow rock in small circles, her dress gently swaying. Sally had not made the connection being laid before her; she’d hardly thought about how Wilbur might have fit in Karl’s history. Suddenly, a whole new world appeared before her.

‘Wilbur!’ Sally exclaimed, ‘You *knew* Karl Jacobs!?’

‘Very well, unfortunately.’ Wilbur sighed. ‘He hit me, once. I dropped the cake at Dream’s wedding.’

‘THAT WAS YOU!?’ Sally cried, ‘WILBUR!!’

Wilbur thought he would be mortified once she’d figured out his place in that damn diary, but he found himself laughing, instead. Her flabbergasted expression was worth the faint humiliation of the actions he’d taken as a young fool with no idea of the truths that made up the world.

‘It was me,’ he admitted.

Sally wanted so deeply to continue this conversation. But she’d come here for a reason and that reason had been taken care of. She had people waiting for her, and she wanted to get the answers she needed from both her parents before this opportunity ended. She had to leave.

Wilbur was sad to see her go. He’d missed her and feared for her and mourned her and missed her again, and knew how it felt to hold her. And now he’d have to let her leave his side once more

Still, let her go he did. They said their goodbyes and Sally made a promise to return later, once she’d hashed things out back home. With that, Wilbur sent her back to the birch forest, where she found her way to the Nether and, within a second, the castle.

It was awkward, to be sure, when she found her parents. The Empress sat at a seat nearly formal enough to be a secondary throne, while Watson sat close by in a more normal chair. Sally sat with them and learned about her heritage - the responsibilities that would fall on her, should she choose to recognize her Nether half.

That was a conversation Sally was not sure she was ready to have, but it was one that *needed* to be had. The truth of her history and theirs.

‘Mother,’ Sally said, testing the word, ‘you know that Kristin isn’t...’

The Empress grieved for the Queen, quietly. Though the two of them had had a deep rift between them, the Empress had never existed in a world that did not also include the Queen. They had come into being together, and now, the Empress truly was alone.

Despite this, the Empress could not regret Kristin’s end. As the nameless one had proved, no one could be immortal, not even gods. One day, so too would the Empress follow the song of the Void, so that history would not repeat. Still - she had Sally. When she left, the throne would not be abandoned.

And this meant that the danger to Watson’s life, should he stay by his Empress’ side, was no longer there.

‘I am older, now,’ Watson said, ‘not nearly as handsome or charming. But I would happily stand at your side, just as I would have then.’

The Empress grew pensive, but ultimately, her admiration for one mortal in particular pushed her curiosity. Would it be nice, for a change, to accept a mortal man, as Kristin had? Without worry that he would be stolen from her by petty hands? Yes, the Empress would like to try it.

The Empress recognized Sally as her heir, should Sally want the position. But the Empress was not yet ready to step down. Kristin had had many hundreds of years with her mortal, why should the Empress settle for less?

Besides, Sally still had the entire overworld to explore. There was much left to learn before she would be able to take a throne like her mother’s. Let her adventure, and perhaps see where her journeys took her with regard to her relationship with the End. Perhaps, the Empress said, Kristin’s desire to one day reunite all the realms might just happen.

Sally declared that talk like that was far too distant; she wanted to see the world, write her own diary, make her mark on Karl’s collection and the world at large. Perhaps even kiss Wilbur before she started to think about marriage and godhood and reuniting the realms.

With that, Sally asked for one last transportation. Her mother, the Empress of the Nether and the Inbetween, snapped her fingers. Sally found herself on a beach.

She found Wilbur waiting in the portal room. When they embraced, Sally was almost embarrassed by how happy she was to see him again.

The two retired to the library, where this whole business had started. Sally spoke about wanting to explore the world, see what could be seen in the overworld before she came to be more permanently stationed. Wilbur agreed; he’d had many years to walk the dirt and enjoy all that was mortal. It was only fair that she be given the same.

But Sally promised to visit. Wilbur laughed, reminded of his parents. Sally, being Vex, was not bothered by staying in the End for prolonged periods. There would be no seven-year rule that kept them apart.

‘You’d be lucky if I visited every seven years,’ Sally teased.

‘I would be,’ Wilbur agreed, which threw Sally into quite the fluster.

Technoblade could only look on, proud and amused. He couldn’t wait to announce to the Void this particular tale. Wilbur Soot had finally fallen into a love story.

And, readers, it’s entirely possible that Sally and Wilbur would reunite the realms - one day, in the far-off future. Sally had a life to live and a diary to write before she agreed to wed, and Wilbur had a kingdom and court to run, after all. But one day, Wilbur would get to hear of her journeys and tell her of his own. Crows would follow Sally as she walked, and Wilbur would stroll in the shadows at her side, content to exist and speak through the soft coos of crows in her ear. One day, Sally would hear the stories in Karl’s diary from Wilbur’s perspective and meet Mellon - the one who Karl wrote the diary for originally.

One day would come - but the days before would be filled with adventure and excitement and, most of all, a hand to hold on that journey.

Proof that neither of them was alone.

The End

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